

# Another Conservation Success Story...

## Taylor County, Georgia

April 2008

### Peach Farmer likes the Micro-irrigation System



Jeff Wainwright of Taylor Orchard shows Ray Jones, district conservationist for the NRCS one of his pumping stations for the micro-irrigation system.

Taylor Orchard, a 3,000-acre family run orchard in Taylor County, has been in the Wainwright family since the 40's covering three generations. Jeff Wainwright manages the daily operations of Taylor Orchard, but the entire family of Walter, his brother, Patricia, his sister, and Patsy Wainwright, his mother, control the overall business, in a small community just outside of Reynolds.

Jeff Wainwright said he had several natural resource concerns he wanted to address. "I was looking for a more efficient way to irrigate the peach trees without wasting the water, without having so much runoff and without compacting the land. That was our three main goals. Burn less diesel, use less water and get a better job done," he said.

Wainwright first learned about the conservation technical assistance provided by the USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) at a Peach Growers Association meeting about three years ago at the Ag Research Center in Byron. He said, "We met with Ray Jones, district conservationist, for the NRCS in Byron, some other people out of Athens and out of Washington, D.C."

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Jones said, "This is the first time we have worked with peach farmers with the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and the micro-irrigation system."

Using EQIP, Wainwright put a 50-acre block under a micro-irrigation system to start with the first year and another 50-acre block right

across the road the second year. Now he is looking at the savings. "I would say putting in that system, on diesel alone, we saved probably 60%. We probably used 40% less diesel with the drip system than we did with the overhead," said Wainwright.

He went on to explain that with the low pressure system, you're running 50 lbs pressure at the pump verses 120-130 lbs pressure at the pump on your overhead irrigation system. You have to set that much head pressure at the well to get the water to go far enough to do any good. "Plus another benefit I see to it is that water is not hitting the fruit, it's just all being taken up by the tree and going to the fruit so you don't have to worry about disease pressure as much. In other words, by doing the emitter system up under the tree you've got the water going all around the canopy of the bottom of the tree and you don't have the water getting on the fruit. A peach, once it gets within two weeks of harvest it doesn't like water," said Wainwright.



Peach tree with blooms.

Wainwright has noticed that using the micro-irrigation system has helped in two ways. It saves him money (cuts down on diseased fruit) and he has a better quality of fruit that tastes better.

The best thing he likes about EQIP is the savings and what it allows him to do. "I like the savings, using less fuel and water and it lets me do some more precision farming. It's a fairly simple program, as compared to some government. This is probably the simplest program I've ever worked with. I'm serious! I mean you apply and they give you the money and you put your plan in. It's that simple," said Wainwright.

Taylor Orchard has benefited from the application of the conservation treatments under EQIP both long and short term. "It enables you to set up something long term in a field. If the program was there and you were financially able you would want every tree you have irrigated under a drip or emitter system. We have 90% irrigated now, but a lot of it is still with the overhead system and that's not efficient. I would like to eventually get 60-70% of my farm under drip or emitters. I would feel great. Look at your fuel savings! It gives you bigger and more marketable fruit," said Wainwright.

He would like future generations, "to realize that with these new techniques to use with your emitter and drips that you can get the job done a lot more efficiently without disturbing the land and without using up your water source and fuel source. Don't be afraid to look at new technology."



One of the emitters used with the micro-irrigation system.

Of the 3,000 acres the orchard has 4 acres in strawberries, 200 acres in pecans and the rest in peaches.

 **NRCS** Natural Resources Conservation Service

478-956-6490

**Ocmulgee River Soil And Water Conservation District**